

March 10, 2022

Testimony of David M. Cohen

Members of the Human Services Committee--

I write in support of Senate Bill 284, which would increase the age for an income-eligible child to obtain medical assistance from eight to eighteen. I am a resident of Stamford and am a practicing attorney in a Stamford law firm, but I do not practice immigration law. I have been a member of the Board of Directors of Building One Community, the agency responsible for integrating immigrants into the community in Stamford and surrounding towns, but I am not writing as the representative of that agency.

The historic expansion of the HUSKY insurance program to undocumented children below the age of nine accomplished by the General Assembly last year was a signature achievement for Connecticut. During the midst of a pandemic, our state recognized that the health of our children affects the health of all of us, and that protecting preschool and elementary school children from illness benefits all children interacting with them, and the entire community as well. Those young children who will now have access to healthcare will benefit throughout their lives in our communities, and will have better outcomes as students, as employees, and as parents as a result.

The existing Husky expansion, in other words, has been commendable, but it is only a start. It does not make sense that an 8-year-old entitled to full health services under HUSKY may be sitting in class next to a 9-year-old with access to none: kids share learning, sports, bus rides, and illnesses. Beyond that boundary issue, however, are many others, including the sibling issue: the 8-year-old insured brother shares everything important in his life with his 10-year-old, 12-year-old and 14-year-old sisters and brother. Put another way, while the groundbreaking achievement in providing healthcare to young children was a major step forward in theory, it was only a small step in practice.

As a state, we have recognized that the immigrant community, documented and undocumented, has made and continues to make enormous contributions to the health and welfare of all residents in our state. We have recognized, in our admirable response to the COVID crisis, that we depend on one another and are responsible for one another. A child may have been born elsewhere, but by the time he or she becomes a lawful permanent resident and then a citizen, it may be too late to provide the medical care that is essential for a healthy adult life, and serious, preventable illness for adults tends to impose extraordinary costs on our society and our state economy.

We have it in our grasp to make certain that by the time a child leaves public schooling for further education, for the military, or for the workplace, she or he has had access to a basic level of healthcare necessary for participation in the life of our state. We have extended that promise to our youngest children, but all children have the same needs. I urge you to support the forward-looking provisions of Senate Bill 284.

Sincerely,

David M. Cohen